

WHY JAN ERNST DE WET IS SA'S MOST COLLECTABLE YOUNG DESIGNER

Architect-turned- ceramic-artist Jan Ernst de Wet is inspired by nature to create textured pieces driven by functionality

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Jan Ernst de Wet' has gone global. Last month he showed a solo virtual exhibition with Galerie Philia, based in New York. The concept, titled 'Into the Wild', creates a **complex dialogue between natural forms and sculptural design pieces**. The body of work comprises **candelabras, vessels and lamps that celebrate the South African landscapes and natural forms that inspire his work**. A selection of the physical work is currently being exhibited at the gallery's Paris outpost. Next year, he will showcase a range of table, floor and wall lamps and pendants with Galerie Revel at the Brussels-based design fair, collectible. 'At the heart of all my creations, there is a meaningful story, and I get tremendous joy in sharing that with people,' says Jan. 'I try to create an interplay between the delicate and robust, nature is full of these contradictions and nuances, and I try to reflect that in my work. The minimal aesthetic is driven by the functionality of the design item. I aim to create a balance between what is pure and true to clay as a material and something that reflects the manicured environments we live in.'



Φ PHILIA

'The "Womb" lamp was inspired by the Cederberg. I became increasingly fascinated by the mysteriousness of this Martian landscape. There is an inexplicable primal feeling that envelops you when you walk around the rock formations and caves. The design explores the ideas of the unknown and unlocked potential – it symbolises the cave and great Mother. The aim of the lamp is to draw you in closer, to swallow you in the dark void when it is just a sculpture but evoke a feeling of giving birth when it is switched on.'

'I find organic form fascinating because it is so honest. It reflects growth, decay and change, so there is a story of time passing. A great example is the rock formations in the Cederberg, carved away by the wind to create monolithic sculptures. From a "making" point of view, clay prefers to be shaped into organic forms rather than straight lines, so the medium accommodates the inspiration and physical form very well.'

Jan believes clay is a medium that has not been explored to its full potential in contemporary design and is drawn to its organic materiality, ability to connect the maker with nature, and how it can be shaped and manipulated. 'I recently started experimenting with wood. It is interesting to consider the different processes – clay allows you to add and subtract mass throughout the making process, while wood only allows you to take away when you work with solid mass forms.'



'The "Squiggle" SideTable was created in collaboration with Meeco studio. Part of a capsule collection, the table explores ideas of rhythm, wavelengths and organic movement. The table was constructed by creating a series of clay slabs that were shaped around curves and joined together. We wanted to emphasise the negative space in the middle and decided to add a bronze-glass top that would highlight the void.'

Drawn to textural design, his work is adorned with unique marks and finishes. 'While smooth is technically also a texture, the mark-making comes from my interpretation of the textures found in nature and leaves traces of engagement with the piece,' he says.

I use texture, not as an applied decorative element, but rather as a means to enhance the compositional lines of the pieces.

Thin lines on the coral-like candelabra emphasise flowing lines, curves and give movement to the piece. The mud-like texture on the anthill anchors the piece to its environment and represents the earth or dirt texture created by ants when they form anthills.'

Describing his work as functional art, Jan explains that, for a long time, art and design were seen as two very distinct disciplines; however, this idea is slowly changing, opening a whole different world of creating. 'Functional art and collectable design are ways to express and tell stories through utilitarian objects or furniture pieces. It creates a platform where the unconventional and quirky can be introduced into our homes and not just viewed in galleries.'